

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 1870.

Subject: Memorials of Divine Mercy.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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THE SUBJECTS OF VOL. III. THUS FAR PUBLISHED ARE

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| I. WATCHFULNESS. | VII. IDEAL STANDARD OF DUTY. |
| II. PAUL AND DEMETRIUS. | VIII. FAULTS. |
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MEMORIALS OF DIVINE MERCY.

"Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." 1 SAM. VII. 12.

After the death of Eli, the prophet, Samuel not only became priest, but, in the anomalous condition of the Israelitish kingdom, he became substantially the sole ruler. The regular government seems to have fallen entirely to the ground—partly because the people were in such an ignorant and degraded state that they were unable to maintain a regular form of government such as theirs was. For the old Hebrew government was substantially a commonwealth—a republican government. It had in it the seeds and roots of that very government which now exists over us. But the people, not instructed, and easily seduced from their allegiance to virtue and religion, had been shattered by the aggression of neighboring nations, and of those whom they had failed to expel from within their borders, and had been reduced to a very low condition—one of great misery. Their very ark had been captured, and carried away (although it was ultimately recovered and saved); and they were in degradation, and under extreme oppression. It was at this time that Samuel appeared, not simply as the judge, making circuit, and as the priest, making sacrifice, but as the leader of the people. Hearing their lamentations, and profoundly affected, as every great soul that loves his country must be by its suffering and degradation, he called the people together to Mizpeh, and then declared to them the way of the Lord. And there the people confessed their great misery and their sin.

"Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods, and Ashteroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim, and Ashteroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh."

When it is said that they "drew water, and poured it out before the Lord," we are to understand that this was the Oriental method. Symbols in the Oriental method were what language is in our instruc-

tion—words being only symbols. And the Israelites, to express the brokenness of their hearts, to convey the idea that their hearts were melted within them, *poured out water*, as much as to say, “So our hearts flow out before God.”

We find frequent recognition of this in the Psalms :

“I am poured out like water.” “My heart is like wax. It is melted in the midst of my bowels.”

In Lamentations, Jeremiah says :

“In the beginning of the watches pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord.”

So that the statement, that they “drew water, and poured it out before the Lord,” merely signifies that, by a symbolic act, they expressed before God this profound grief, and their penitence.

It is said that at this time “Samuel judged the children of Israel.” The whole nation was full of wrongs, and unsettled quarrels, and complaints, and feuds, and a thousand entanglements which grow up under malign feeling. And he settled everything, and harmonized the people, and made justice among them, so that they felt that the past was settled, and that they had now a new future before them.

“And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering woolly unto the Lord; and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel; but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”

This follows in the line of other such like uses of rude monuments. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan, they took, you will recollect, stones out of the middle of the river, and brought them over, and established a monument. There will recur to your memory many instances in which there were some such memorials as these.

Now, here was a great victory; and Samuel took a stone, and set it up as a rude monument. Art, in later days, has perfected the monumental system; and we rear monuments which represent the skill and taste of the people, to commemorate great events. In earlier days, and in simpler ways, perhaps, and with as much patriotism, though with less taste, monuments were erected of heaps of stone, or of single slabs of stone. And to emphasize this great victory, Samuel erected this rude stone. Not, however, for the sake of inspiring the people with a sense of their own courage; and not simply with the purpose of inspiring them with patriotic ardor. He set up the stone, and said “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” For all the preparation for this

warfare had been moral. There was no drilling of the clans—for the tribes were but clans; there was no battle array; there was no military hero. Samuel, eminently a priest and a civilian, had led them into this battle; and the people were afraid when they knew that the Philistines were coming upon them. And when they had repented; when they had settled their wickednesses among themselves; when they had turned their hearts toward God, and promised to serve Him only; and when Samuel had performed the sacrificial service, and blessed them, and sent them forth to the battle, probably some great storm occurred, or might have been ordained of God, or might have been appropriated for that occasion as a providence of God. At any rate, God “thundered” in the heaven, and the Philistines were appalled, and thought that the Gods of the Hebrews were fighting against them; and the battle went against them; and all the people rolled on, and drove their oppressors and adversaries to their uttermost cities. Where Bethcar was, modern research cannot determine; nor is it particularly important. On returning from this great victory, Samuel set up this memorial-stone, that all Israel might look upon it, and remember that *hitherto the Lord had helped them*. Not their own prowess, not their own military skill, but the hand of the Lord, in which they trusted, had delivered them.

There is, then, a distinct recognition, here, of the hand of God in providence; and there is a marking of the event of God's interference in their behalf by some visible outward sign which would serve to bring it back to them. For no man, after the battle and the victory, returning that way, and beholding this stone, would forget it. They would cherish it in their memory, and tell their children of it. And if their occasions or needs ever took any of them again through the region of their old captivity, their old fear, the old battle and the old victory, that outside memorial would stand to remind them, not merely of each external event, but also of the interior moral truth that it was of the Lord's mercies that they were preserved, and that it was of God's interposing providence that they were victorious.

Now, we are in many respects like the Israelites. We, too, have a promised land into which we are brought by our hopes in Christ. Our promised land is just like Palestine. Its mountains and passes are filled with unsubdued inhabitants. They are all about us. On the East are the Moabites and the Hivites, and on the West and Southwest are the Philistines, hanging on the skirts of our spiritual kingdom, or in the midst of it, in their mountain dens and fastnesses. We, too, are watched. Often incursions are suddenly made against us, and we are carried into captivity, or are humbled in battle. Often, too, the hand of the Lord is lifted up in our behalf; and the

battle goes against the Philistines, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and the inhabitants of the land, and we beat them down, and we drive them back, so that they have no more dominion over us for a time. We are full of conflicts. And yet, we maintain our ground, and hold ourselves only by vigilance, as in the presence of a continually watching enemy. And in this great warfare, which goes on with all true Christians, and goes on just in proportion as they are truly Christian; just in proportion as their standard of Christian life is high; just in proportion as they are determined to bring every thought and feeling into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ; just in proportion to the comprehensiveness and richness of that which they mean by being Christians in their life and disposition—in this great warfare your conflicts are many, and the vicissitudes of those conflicts are many.

There are, in the history of every man, certain remarkable events that are worthy to be remembered. At any rate, there are divine interpositions in our behalf, as there was here a divine interposition, by which Israel gained a victory. And as Samuel, inspired of God, set up an external memorial, as a witness of that event, that he and his people Israel might not forget to be grateful; so in our conflicts it is well for us to mark the interpositions of God's providence in our behalf. It is well for us from point to point to set up some memorial, according to our disposition and circumstances, and to say, from step to step, "Hitherto, the Lord hath helped me." It is worth our while to keep in review all the goodness of God to us along the line of our march, and to have imperishable memorials of that goodness.

The gracious and providential interference of God in our behalf deserves to be noted. The memory of all his mercies ought to be perpetuated. Every critical period, as the turning of the year; every point of success in any enterprise of life; every point where we gain a higher joy, whether it be secular, or social, or spiritual; every new relation which promises great blessedness to us; every business achievement which seems to lift us out of darkness and out of difficulties; every great mischief that impended as a threatening sky, but that is rolled away—every such event or experience ought to have a distinct recognition.

We live so fast, and we live in such thunder and din, that thousands of things are happening in the course of the year which are pre-eminently efficacious in working out our disposition and our nature, which are educating us, and which are having a great influence in determining our whole future condition, but which go so quick, or are heeded so little, that they pass by without any special recognition. And yet, no man ought to allow anything which has a distinct influence on his personality to go unthought of, unstudied, unrecognized.

There are critical experiences which befall every household; and they ought to become a part of the calendar of that household. The birth of a child; the death of a child; the marriage hour of a child; the point at which a child is received into the visible body of the Lord Jesus Christ; times of bankruptcy; times of recovery from poverty; times of sickness; times of returning health—these are eminently significant. It is not enough to think of them as among the rubbish of mere secular happenings. They go back. They have vital bearings. They make us worse. They make us better. They lift us up. They crush us down. They are at work on our immortality. Something in heaven will by-and-by say to us, "This sprung from that;" and the threads of being will then be traced all the way down to experiences here upon earth. And as these things occur it is wise for us to heed them, to study them, to set them apart from the ordinary flow of events, and to say in respect to them, "The Lord hath done this;" or, "The hand of the Lord is in this."

And that which is true of these external and social influences, is more eminently true of internal experiences.

The coming on of a great trouble or grief (and every heart knows its own sorrow); the hours of anguish, which we may or may not confide to another; those habitual troubles which weigh down life with a perpetual gravitation; and, on the other hand, the rolling away of grief; the glad morning after the night; the dawn of great affections in the soul—which are the best blessings that God ever gives, and are to us what the coming of the morning sun is to the day; the emerging into the light of a new faith; victories over easily besetting sins; the conquest over inbred sins; clearer views; stronger impulses of conscience; a new sense of manhood infused into our souls; a more heroic impulse taking the place of a craven or mere physical habitude of obedience—all these critical inward experiences are worthy of some external recognition. That is, we should specialize them. We should think of them in their individuality, and in their sequences; and it would be well for us if we could set up some memorial, and be able to say to one and another, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me. It is the Lord—not my skill, not my wisdom, not my prowess—that hath helped me hitherto."

Our true life is the inward life. It deserves, therefore, to be specially watched and recorded. No other thing deserves such celebrations as a man's inward victory—his inward deliverance. A blessing that comes from God should be recognized by us, though it comes in no visible form. If God were to send to us a great fortune, how would our friends come in to congratulate us! If it were known that some far off, distant, and perhaps unknown or unrecognized one, had died

and left a million of dollars to me, should I not receive at my door the visits and congratulations of sympathizing friends? And yet, there is more treasure and power in one great thought that clears life of mystery, that sheds its beams along down the path that my feet are to tread, that gives me a broader horizon, a higher vision, and a sweeter, truer and nearer God, than in all the possession of the broad earth. If one had been in great trouble, and bankruptcy had rolled over him, and humiliation had followed, and if he had been delivered from the pride and arrogance of oppressing creditors, and reinstated, and placed in the midst of his former friends, there would be great reason for gratulation, and great reason why he should set up a memorial. But if one has been living a life of ordinary care, and insight has sprung up in him, and great affection has taken possession of his mind, and sweet influences have come upon him, softening his temper, quickening all his hope of life, and breathing like fragrant summer in every direction, there is more reason still why he should set up a memorial. The possession of a new fountain of love in one's soul is far more than his reinstatement in external prosperity. God's greatest gifts are those which he gives to the inward affections—to the soul's powers. And although outward blessings are not to be despised; though they have ministrations of mercy in them; though they have in them much instruction and comfort and enjoyment; yet, the things that are not seen are mightier than the things that are seen. The empire of a man's life lies within him, and not outside of him. And it is victories over vulgarity; it is triumphs over pride; it is smittings against the rock and the gushings out of fountains in the wilderness; it is the dealings of the hand of the Lord inwardly with our thoughts and feelings and emotions, that most deserve to be signally noted, and heedfully perpetuated, by some memorial set up which testifies that "hitherto the Lord hath helped us." Such experiences of mercy should be followed by memorials to signalize them, because something of the kind is necessary to keep alive in the memory these special favors of God to us.

No one who has a constant succession of good fortune, keeps any ideal in his mind of the number of divine mercies of which he is the recipient. If God were to recount what he has done for us, it would seem as though our life were a golden chain, in which one golden link clasped another, every hour being a link, and every day lengthening the chain. And yet, we frequently feel as though our life was a desolate, barren life, because we have not noticed what the benefits of God to us really were; because we have taken no such heed as to be impressed that the Lord was guiding and defending us, and giving us victory. One mercy covers down another, like waves of the sea. One follows another, and

there seems to be but the one that is rolling in at just the present moment. We do not stop to think that the events which redeem this day, which fill this hour with peace, and which open the future to us, are special divine mercies. We attribute these things to ourselves. And so men become their own providence and their own God. They think for themselves; they will for themselves; they execute for themselves; they care for themselves; and they are accustomed to feel that the strength of their right-hand, and the wisdom of their head, hath multiplied the mercies of this life to them. Their life is full of events of mercy, only they do not heed them. They do not know that God is performing these marvels around about them. The unthought-of things are often full of beauty, and full of strangeness.

I sometimes think, of a night, that it is a sin to go into the house and leave God's glory flashing abroad in the Northern Lights, or in the stellar exhibitions in all the broad expanse above, without a witness—certainly without my witnessing them. I feel as though it were a stupidity to retire to sleep with all this amazing display going on. For, what are men's inventions and ingenuities compared with those astonishing developments which every summer's day shows us in the clouds, in the storms, and in frescoes of light and beauty? Every single day there is enough in the silence of nature, and in the might of nature, enough to fill the soul with joy and gratitude. But, while day tells it to day, and night repeats it to night, man sees but little of it.

And as it is in nature, so even more is it in providence. Not only are there a thousand things going on around about us which we do not heed, but there are a thousand things going on within us, which, for want of education, we do not mark nor recognize.

It is well for us, therefore, not only to specially note these things at the time, but to set up some sort of memorial to fasten them in the memory, that they may be of service to us by-and-by. This may be done in a variety of ways. A few only I will suggest.

There may be kept a calendar of dates. It is astonishing how much one can preserve in this way with very little trouble. When traveling in Europe, I was so full of excitement and enjoyment that I had not time to keep a journal; so I just put down under each date one single word—the name of the city; or the name of the picture; or the name of the mountain; or the name of the pass; or the name of some person whom I had met; and now I can go back over a month's travels, and, though there are but these single words, that whole history starts up when I look at them. If you regularly take a memorandum book, at night, and think back through the day, and bring up before you what God has done for you, what he has shown you, what significant thing has happened, and put down the caption of it under the proper

date, you will be surprised to find what a calendar your book will become at the end of every year. Never was there a history written which was so full of wonder as any single life before me during a whole year. Never were there written things so improbable as many things that are all the time happening. Never were there events, conjunctions, circumstances, that had so broad and lasting an influence as the things which we pass by as matters of course. And it is worth one's while to keep some record of these things. There are some men who can keep a journal; but the men who can keep a journal to profit are born to it. Other men cannot. Therefore I do not exhort you to keep a journal. In the first place, there is not one man in a hundred that can keep a journal without knowing that somebody may see it. I tried it, and I know. A man who undertakes to keep a journal, and tells how wicked he is—does not he know that it may fall into the hands of somebody; and does not he smooth down the rough corners, and leave out some things? I tried to keep a journal, and I found that it was false all through, a little being added here, and a little being taken off there; there being a little too much light here, and a little too much darkness there. The shading was false from beginning to end; and I kicked it out of the house. I would not therefore advise you to keep a journal. No man is justified in turning himself inside out in a diary. It usually leads to a morbid introversion, and to a kind of conceit as well.

But this is very different from keeping a calendar of dates and events merely, which you shall understand, and no one else shall—which shall be made up of mnemotechnic symbols, by which you shall be able to recall from the waste of the past, events, judgments, mercies, which have been very significant—a book full of Eben-ezers, at each one of which you may stand and say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me."

Then I have often thought it would be no unwise thing for one to make his house a kind of museum—to his own eyes at any rate, and to a certain extent to the whole family—of events and histories. In some of the German houses there is a charming habit of this sort. Wealthy men there build their houses for themselves and their children to live in; and therefore it is worth their while to do what it is scarcely worth our while to do. Instead of papering their rooms, or frescoing them in the ordinary way, they employ the ablest artists of their times to paint their walls with the most exquisite landscapes, which are to stand there for ages. And in these landscapes are representations of their own family here and there. Here, for instance, are the grand-parents; there are the children; and here are the friends and neighbors. And so, one has in his house a kind of memorial of his social relationships, and of everything significant in the family history. It is a most charming

idea if it be executed fitly. But I would not recommend to you any such custom as this, which is very expensive, and unfitted to our habits and manners. And yet, it is quite possible for one to have objects on his wall which shall answer very much the same purpose. A leaf here, an anchor there, or a little flower, plucked, dried, and hung in its proper place, may mark some significant passage in one's history.

This may be seen in castles. The man of the castle says, "Do you see those antlers? Do you see that frontal? I will give you a history of that hunting expedition." They are memorials which he has preserved of various experiences in hunting.

And why might not that be carried out further? When a child is born in the family, why might there not be hung up some memorial of that event which should never depart from the wall? Why might not every one that lives leave behind some significant thing that should ever bring him back to the memory of those who knew him when their eyes should chance to rest upon it? Why should not every dawning mercy have a star blazing from the wall, and saying to every one that looks upon it, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me?" Why should our houses be so barren of our own history? Why should we leave our eyes so entirely without the aid of interpreting symbols? I know not why a person's house should not become a kind of memorial of personal history.

Or, a journal might be made of the Bible. If one has a Bible of his own—and every one should have; if one has a Bible that he reads to the exclusion of every other one—and every person should have a Bible that he is as used to as he is to his father's garden or dooryard, so that he can readily put his hand on any chapter or verse in it; if one has such a Bible, which is his own property, he may register any significant event by marking certain texts or passages which are eminently suited to it. In that way he will form the habit of selecting passages of Scripture which are adapted to the various exigencies of this life. And how beautiful it is! If you keep a kind of register, so that the text refers to and is associated with the event, your Bible becomes a memorial. You are setting up all the way through it stones of remembrance, as it were. You are providing a record for your old age. And by-and-by, when you take down your Bible, and put on your glasses, and look back upon your past life, not only will it be the word of God, but you will find how the word of God fed you in the wilderness, strengthened you in sickness, and comforted you in circumstances of discouragement. How many things a man can record on the fly-leaves of his Bible which will afford him pleasure and profit in after life! And how precious that Bible will become to him when he has woven it into his experience as a kind of epitomizing of his life!

My old mother—my wife's mother—who has gone home to heaven, and who was over ninety years of age when she died, had, when I was in college, one of those little books called "Daily Food," in which there was a verse, a text, for every day of the year. She was a godly woman; and it was her habit, in this little "Daily Food," or calendar for every day in the year, to mark special occurrences and experiences, till it became, to her, a sort of transparent history of her children. There was this trouble that came on such a day; or there was that sorrow which was heard of on such a day; and along with the record of it was a text; and it oftentimes seemed almost like a revelation that such a text should have such a place. And she pinned her history with texts of Scripture in this way. Every important event connected with her life is doubtless noted there. I have no doubt that the day of my wedding is put down somewhere, with a text of Scripture pinned to it. There is something beautiful in this habit, as well as something most useful.

Or, one might, if blessed with means, take the occasions of God's helpfulness to him, and make them also occasions of charity. There are what are called "memorial windows" in churches. There are some in St. Ann's Church, which has just been completed in this city. Such windows are put in often, by affection, to be the memorial of a wife, or sister, or parent, or child, or friend. In the old country there are a great many of them. One of the most affecting things I ever saw in my life was in the church of the "Succoring" Virgin—that is, of Mary the Succorer. It was, I believe, in one of the French cities. The whole church was filled with tablets. Here was one of an officer, for three days deliverance, on such, and such, and such dates. It was a little marble slab let into the wall, inscribed with letters of gold. On inquiring and comparing dates, I found it was during the battle of Inkerman, at a time when the French army were in great danger. The man had been preserved; and when he came back, he put up in this church this tablet, recalling the mercy of God in sparing his life. Another inscription was, "My babe was sick; I called to the Virgin; she heard me; and my child lives." There was the tablet that celebrated that event. And I could not read these inscriptions without having tears fall from my eyes like drops from a spice bush when shaken in a dewy morning.

Now, everybody ought to have a church somewhere for himself—not a literal church; but some place where he can celebrate God's special goodness to him. Suppose, when God spares the life of your child, you should say (if you are blessed with the means), "I will make this significant by finding an orphan child, and setting apart that which shall take care of that child. I will make my benefaction to that child a perpetual memorial for the life of my dear child!" Or,

has God taken away your child—that sweetest girl? As you lay that child in the grave you will need no memorial of her. And yet the hand of God was in this event. And why should you not set apart something to signify your sense of God's presence with you in your affliction? Why should you not organize something that will endure?

Oh! if men should write their sense of God's goodness to them on the tables of living hearts, how in one's lifetime the whole community would be filled full of these significant instances of his gratitude, and testimonies of God's goodness to him, and his presence either in trials or in joys!

Besides these, there may be, for preëminent and most significant events in our history, days set apart. We have ecclesiastical days, of course; we have patriotic or national days, of course; we have our birth days, of course. Now, there are some days that are worth to us more than all others put together—days that each heart knows; days mysterious; days of sorrow; days of bitterness; days of transcendent joy; days of conflict; wondrous days that we can carry before God, and only God. And how worth one's while it would be to single out these days, as memorials, as it were, and set them up like a stone, and say, "Hitherto hath God helped me!"

I suggest but these few ways in which we may commemorate the important events of our history. You yourselves can see how they might be diversified and increased.

If such a course of noting God's dealings with us, if such a course of setting up memorials by way of recognising the hand of God in the shaping of our lives, be established and followed out, by-and-by we shall come to a habitual sense of God's presence with us. Not only will there be the record of these events, but there will be the impression educated in us that God is always with us. There will be the greater and the lesser mercies; but there will be a sense of continuous mercy, and continuous kindness. God will be with us in gifts every day, as well as in those special gifts which we mark as memorable. And lines of light will come out in every direction from our experience.

Most of us are in such a doubting state; we so fail to couple God's watch and care over us; we so fail to weave them into a sense of his universal and continuous providence, that we have the same battles to fight over and over again. We ought at least to come to that state in respect to God and his providence which we do in respect to our friends. You have friends that you trust. You have friends that you know, if you were sick, would not betray you. You have friends that you know would not desert you if you were unfortunate in business. You have friends that you know would, to the extent of their power,

stand by you in the dark hour. You have friends that you know would never fail to give you good counsel, and to sympathize with you in trouble. I pity the man who has not some "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," and that would go through thick and thin with him. But God, the best and most inexpressibly precious Friend, whose whole life is one prolonged, continuous benefaction to us, is the very one that we trust the least. And though a thousand dark hours have come to us, and God has helped us in every one of them, we have failed to carry along a faithful remembrance of them, and to say, "He that helped me hitherto, will help me in all time to come;" so that when the threat is in the heaven, we are just as much alarmed as though it had never been there a thousand times before. When a great sorrow is upon us, we act as though we had never known sorrow before, and had never before been delivered from sorrow. And in the midst of our various experiences of life, how we fail to believe that God loves us, that he is faithful to us, and that he will never leave us nor forsake us! If we had been accustomed to commemorate, by date and memorials, our past experiences, by-and-by we should have had the habit of looking up in such a way as to be able to go on, and, when trouble came, face it undaunted, and say, "The Lord lives; and while he lives I shall not suffer."

Hear the Psalmist in his deep grief:

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him." "O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordon, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayers unto the God of my life."

Such was his state of mind that, first came the grief, and then the recognition that God would succor him in his grief.

Such a day as to-day—the first Sabbath in the new year—seems to me to be a day eminently fit for the beginning of good habits and the nourishing of good tendencies. Christian brethren, why should we not begin this year with the resolution, in the first place, of looking back upon the last year, and singling out what remains to us of God's goodness? And why should we not recognize in some way or other our sense of gratitude to God? Why should we not set up some stone, and mark thereon, "Eben-ezer," and say, "Hitherto God hath helped me." There were many stones set up last year—memorials of anguish; testimonials of bereavements. Oh! that there were that Christian faith which should convert every sudden grief into a testimony of triumph, and, above all, a witness of God's fidelity! Has not God been good to you during the last year? Has he not been good to you in your family? Has he not relieved you from a thousand troubles when you

have called out to him? Has he not, many and many a time, during the past year, taught you to trust in him for his goodness? Has he not lifted your feet from many an obstacle? Has he not sweetened your life? Has he not made death itself less terrible to you? Has he not drawn near to you in ways most gentle, tender, rich, and soul-filling? Has he not proved himself to be just such a Friend as he promised to be? Nay more, has he not done exceeding abundantly more than you asked or thought? Has he not sent mercies that you had no reason to expect? Has he not averted judgments that seemed to break on your head? Has he not been unspeakably good to you during the past year? And is not to-day a day for memorials? Is it not a day for setting up some remembrance of God? Cannot we all, to-day, say, "Hitherto hath God helped me?" Let us begin this year with the purpose of heart to live more childlike, more trustful, more believing, more spiritual lives, than we have lived in times gone by. And let us see to it, as month after month rolls away, that we are becoming more observant, more conscious of God's very great bounties to us, and more grateful for them.

My dear friends, there is nothing that comforts and encourages me so much, as to have you tell me that my preaching has made you better. I am not unconscious of pleasure in knowing that you think that, of my sermons, this or that is an able one, or an intellectual one, or has elements of taste in it. Every faculty in me is alive and sensitive. But God is my witness, that in none of these things do I have the pleasure that I do in the testimony, "Your preaching has helped me bear my burdens. Your preaching has sustained me in my struggles inwardly. The truth that God has delivered to me by you has been blessed in making me better. I am better in my heart, and better in my house, and I am trying all the time to be better in my business." That is comfort.

Now, may God grant that in the year which is to come, I may be able to divide the word so that every one of you may have a portion in due season. May I be able to present to you God's everlasting truth so that it shall be a support to you in life, through life, and unto eternal life. Let me have your prayers that I may be able, through all this year, more searchingly to preach the truth, to bring it into relation to every inward faculty, and more and more richly endow you with a knowledge of the truth. Let me have your sympathy and your prayers, that in the year which is to come I may so preach the truth that you shall be nobler, more generous, more patient, more self-denying, and more thoughtful of other men's happiness. Oh! that God would make your houses more blessed houses than they have ever been before, in this year which is to come!

Are you in companionship? Let your companion bear testimony concerning you, at the end of the year, "I have never had so much comfort of his society as during this year." Are you living in family relations? Let every one in your family say of you, "His presence, this year, has been more full of light and sweetness than ever before." Are you in business relations? Let men say of you, "I never had such a savor of Christ in a man as I have had this year in him." Bear the precious name of Jesus with you into every part of your life; and in all the experiences which rise up to you in that blessed name, do not forget to be grateful at the time. And do not forget to have some souvenir and memorial by which you shall connect these various kindnesses of God, and be able, every year, to set up another testimony, and say, "Hitherto hath God helped me."

And by and by, when sickness comes, may God grant that you may go through all the region of the valley of the shadow of death saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." When you come to the brink of the river, do not shrink. And as you go out of our sight, and reach the far shore, send back some airy voices to say still, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me." And when you rise and stand in Zion and before God, God grant that you may be able to say, in the presence of all the holy angels, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me."

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We acknowledge thee, Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—one God—our God—God over all, blessed forever. In thy immeasurable blessing we are comprehended, morning and night; and at all intervening hours, thy mercies are new, continuous, and inexpressibly rich. Thou it is that dost bring joy when joy is best, and dost bring sorrow when sorrow is nourishing and needed. Thou dost come to us with thy face unveiled and full of light; and thou dost hide thyself behind the clouds; and yet, when clouds are around about thee, justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne. Our fathers have trusted thee, and thou didst not forsake them. We have trusted thee, and thou hast never forsaken us. Nor wilt thou cast off any that put their trust in thee. Though helpless, though erring, though sinning from day to day, thou wilt not cast them off. But thou wilt inspire them to greater diligence. Thou wilt awake sorrow and repentance in their souls. Thou wilt bring them back with confessions. Even if it be with stripes and chastisements, thou wilt bring them to a renunciation of their sins, and give them victory over them. Thou wilt work mightily in all those that have opened their hearts to thee, that thou mayest impart unto them of the Godhead, building up in them that which is given to them of thine own nature, bringing them more and more out from the dominion of the body and its powers, out from the dominion of the world that is visible, and bringing them more and more into the sacred presence of God and the invisible world, where all thy offices of spiritual power are performed. Thou wilt make them sons of God inwardly, and by a blessed affection of thy spirit thou wilt make them to know that they are thy children. Thou wilt breathe into them such affection that they shall be able to say, Our Father, and know that in the breathing of their souls they have the testimony of God that they are sons of God.

And now, we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that we may feel more that fatherhood, that everlasting relation of life, which thou hast shown by thy grace. Grant that we may feel that thou art a merciful Creator and Redeemer, dealing with us not only with mercy, but with that gladness of mercy which is everlasting—which hath been from the foundation of the world, and shall be to the end thereof. Grant that we may be brought into sweet relationship to thee as the all-inspiring and instructing Spirit of God.

May we have commerce with thee Father, Son and Spirit. Grant to every one of us a special and personal relation to thee, and the knowledge of it, and all the joy of it. Grant that from day to day our life may be hid with Christ in God. And may there be between us and thee that secret, that unspoken, that dearest life of love which all love knows, and chiefly that which exists between our souls and thine. Give to us those moments of silence which no word can describe. Give to us those blessed moments of insight when all the glory of the invisible truth shall appear to us. Give us those hours on the mountain-top when thou art transfigured; and yet, make us willing to come down again and wrestle with sin and all the distress and labor of life.

Give us, we beseech of thee, more and more a blessed sense of the certainty of our salvation, not by reason of our effort, nor by reason of our strength, but from thy faithfulness, and from the boundlessness of thy love.

And so, we beseech of thee, that thou wilt grant unto us these inward mercies, sanctifying to us all outward providences; all events which transpire, and which relate to us, in ordinary providences. Grant that they may every one bring forth some fruit in the soul, that we may grow rich inwardly; more truthful; more courageous in things that are right; more deep in our affection; more spiritual; more disinterested; and that we may have more faith, more hope, more love, and a calmer foresight into the coming glory of thy spiritual kingdom. So work in us mightily, both by thy providence and by thy grace.

And we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all, this morning, that are in thy presence, and upon all that wish they were here, but are hindered by thy providence. We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant to the sick thy sustaining presence, and thy comforting care. If any are appointed unto death, show them that the way

of death is the way of God, and be thou with them to sustain them in all the way. If there are any that must needs give up their beloved into thy hands again, prepare them for the sacrifice; and grant that they may have faith, so that it may not seem to them that death is a devouring monster. May it seem to them the gate of heaven which thou, by the hand of love, dost open, and where thou dost quench earthly sorrow, and where thou hidest their beloved. And we beseech of thee, if there are any that are afflicted and mourning, that thou wilt give them more and more the treasure of the world to come, as less and less they have an earthly treasure. And if there are any that are walking solitary, or in loneliness of heart, while in the midst of multitudes, be thou with them—thou that wert alone, and yet not alone, because thy Father was with thee. Be thou the companion of every one that needs thee, and solace every heart that needs the strength and all the blessed influences of thy love.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless those who give thanks to thee in the memory of the past—who look back upon the year that is gone, and offer here their glad thanksgiving unto the Lord. We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless all those that look forward upon this year with an earnest desire to make it the best year of their lives. May each succeeding year with us all be growing brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless those who are members of this church, and all those that are to-day to be united to us. We pray that it may not be alone an outward union. May it be a union also in things spiritual, true, deep and everlasting. And bless all those that to-day for the first time shall be joined to the visible and outward church of God. May they feel that they belong to the greater invisible church: to that great multitude that no man can number, that are sanctified in heaven; to that great company that cannot be enumerated on earth—men of faith and zeal of every name, speaking all languages, feeling one love, with all service, and with but one God. Grant that they may rejoice that thus their relationship is enlarged. And may they assume thy name and thy service with gladness, and rejoice in them, not counting them a bondage, but a liberty from bondage; not counting them a yoke, but a liberty from all yokes.

And we beseech of thee, O Lord our God, that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon those that are gathered with us who have not named thy name; who do not know thy spirit; who are walking yet in the midst of thy mercies with pride, with selfishness, with worldly-mindedness given up to the flesh and to its appetites. Oh! turn them from these baser things. Turn them from this lower life. Grant that they may behold how noble is the way of the Lord. May their feet be drawn into thy paths. May their hearts be sanctified by thy spirit. And may they this year, may they this day, begin that new life which shall never waver; which shall never go back; which shall grow stronger and purer and brighter unto the perfect day.

Bless, we beseech of thee, all the churches of this city; and may all those that preach thy word, to-day, be prepared to preach it in sincerity and in truth, and with power. Grant that they who go forth bearing precious seed weeping, may return speedily bringing sheaves in their bosom. Bless all the churches in our land. Unite thy people more and more in common labor, and common sympathy. And grant that the hand of charity may bring all together, however different they may be in their other relations. And we pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all the efforts that are being made for the promotion of intelligence,—upon all schools, and colleges, and seminaries of learning of every kind.

Bless those who are seeking to rear the young; those who are striving to enlighten the poor and the ignorant. And grant that everywhere this great nation may become intelligent, just, true, God-fearing, and man-loving. Let thy kingdom come everywhere, and the whole earth see thy salvation. Which we ask for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

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